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RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 2076
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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000102

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA - JROSHOLT

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Stay tuned: is a Bouterse replacement in Parliament imminent?

¶1. (U) Desi Bouterse - Head of Suriname's largest opposition party (the National Democratic Party, NDP), Parliamentarian, and main suspect in the trial of the 1982 murder of fifteen political opponents - has been absent from Parliament for the past thirteen months. According to Surinamese law, National Assembly membership may be terminated after five consecutive months of absence. In late January 2009, National Assembly Chair Paul Somohardjo sent Bouterse a letter purporting to formally terminate his position (as Parliamentarian), briefed President Venetiaan on the situation, and notified the Central Head Voting Bureau of the development so that the Bureau could take steps to appoint Bouterse's National Assembly successor.

¶2. (SBU) But was Somohardjo's action constitutional? On March 20, 2009, Samuel Polanen, who is widely considered neutral and Suriname's leading authority on Constitutional Law, told PolOff that he questioned the constitutionality of removing Bouterse. According to media reports, however, the Central Head Voting Bureau informed District Commissioner Rudi Strijk, Chairperson of the Voting Bureau in Paramaribo, that NDP member Ginmardo Kromosoetoe is the designee who has been selected to replace Bouterse in the Parliament.

¶3. (SBU) According to Surinamese law, Kromosoetoe has 14 days to accept the position. Political circles are abuzz with rumors that all the eligible NDP replacement candidates, including Kromosoetoe, would refrain from accepting this offer out of loyalty to Bouterse. When asked by PolOff about this possibility, District Commissioner Strijk said that no response within 14 days would be interpreted as a rejection of this offer but refrained from speculating any further.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT. As of April 6, there is still no announcement as to whether Kromosoetoe will accept the position, nor whether it would be constitutional for him to do so. Post will continue to query the experts on the likely outcome, but expects that Somohardjo's flashy gesture to oust Bouterse from Parliament will remain just that: a gesture with little follow-up and negligible impact in the short-term. The longer-term prognosis remains in question. END COMMENT.

SCHREIBER HUGHES